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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN G/TIP (JENNIFER SCHROCK-DONNELLY)

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S ANTI-TIP PROGRESS: SHELTER OPEN, MIA  
RESTRUCTURED

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Over the past few months, the GOAJ been quite active in its anti-TIP efforts, making progress on several fronts. In this time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has undergone restructuring by removing the anti-TIP sub-unit from the Organized Crime Unit (OCU) - notorious for gross human rights violations - and creating a new Unit to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Former Lankaran Chief of Police, Rafiq Abbasov, has been brought in as the head of this new unit, and former head of the anti-TIP sub-unit, Imran Najafov, has been named deputy. After undergoing months of renovations, the shelter for victims of trafficking in persons was opened in an October 11 official ceremony. Although the MIA is still working to identify a suitable location for a TIP hotline, the GOAJ recently assigned a number for the hotline that is accessible toll-free both in Azerbaijan and internationally. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) In an August 1 decree, President Ilham Aliyev announced the restructuring of the MIA, which included the creation of a new Unit to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Rafiq Abbasov, the former Chief of the Lankaran Police Department, has been named as the head of the new Unit to Combat Trafficking in Persons, while Imran Najafov, who was previously the head of the anti-TIP sub-unit, has been appointed deputy. Prior to this decree, the GOAJ's anti-TIP efforts were the responsibility of a sub-unit located within the OCU, a unit that has been implicated repeatedly in credible allegations of gross human rights violations and has failed to properly investigate and prosecute those responsible for these violations.

¶3. (SBU) As long as the anti-TIP sub-unit was located within the OCU, the Leahy Amendment prohibited USG-funded training for Azerbaijan's Special Anti-Trafficking (SPAT) officers. Now that the unit has been removed from the OCU, Azerbaijan's SPAT officers stand a better chance of receiving much-needed USG-funded training - provided, of course, that the individual officers have not committed any gross human rights violations. (Note: Post is still trying to obtain the completed applications and background investigation notes on the current SPAT officers. Until the MIA provides this information, it is impossible to determine if these officers were hired and vetted in a manner compliant with international standards.)

¶4. (SBU) After undergoing months of renovations, the shelter for TIP victims was opened in an October 11 official ceremony attended by the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Ambassador, and the members of the International TIP Working Group - comprised of the Embassy and Baku-based representatives from the OSCE and IOM. The volunteer shelter staff - who received

USG-funded training in July - will spend several weeks acclimating to the shelter's schedule and procedures, after which the shelter will be ready to receive victims. With the exception of a delay in the installation of surveillance equipment promised by the OSCE, all appliances and furniture are in place. (Note: This equipment is not critical for the shelter to function. OSCE representatives have told us that the equipment has been ordered and will be installed soon.)

15. (SBU) In a step beyond the agreement outlined in Azerbaijan's National TIP Action Plan, the GOAJ recently assigned a TIP hotline number that is accessible toll-free both in Azerbaijan and internationally. However, the hotline number cannot be put to use until the MIA identifies a location suitable to house the hotline. The MIA had previously agreed to find a location by August 31, a deadline that was not met. Shortly thereafter, the Unit to Combat Trafficking in Persons staff proposed one location that was technically acceptable to the International TIP Working Group, but subsequently informed the International TIP Working Group that the location was not appropriate, citing security concerns. The MIA is currently searching for another location that will have the proper security measures in place.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Now that the shelter is completely renovated and furnished, it will be ready to receive victims as soon as the volunteers have acclimated to the schedule and procedures. The initial group of shelter residents will consist of victims who are currently housed with local NGOs, but it likely will be several months before unidentified victims develop the confidence to come to the shelter. In addition, until the hotline is functioning, the proper nationwide referral network necessary to provide victims with information about the shelter will not be in place. We continue to engage the MIA on its anti-TIP efforts (including

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press reports on a series of recent TIP arrests) and will report further developments septel.  
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